Narrator: William Kelso (WK)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

Interview Date: 13 August 2012

Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: Retired member of the Canadian Grain Commission weigh staff in Thunder Bay William Kelso discusses his career on the Thunder Bay waterfront. He shares the story of returning injured from WWII and getting a job with the government as a CGC railcar checker. He describes his responsibilities in the grain elevators, like ensuring all grain was emptied from boxcars, checking for spills in elevator tunnels, sounding shipping bins for outward weighing, and checking dust control operations. He describes some of the elevators on the Kam River, particularly their dangerous and dirty conditions, as well as his encounters with wildlife. Kelso then discusses his move to working out in the CPR and CNR railyards as a car checker, checking boxcars for seals and leaks and writing reports to inform elevator staff of potential weight issues. He recalls a major issue of grain getting stuck between boxcar walls and liners, and he explains the CGC's duty to account for all grain. He shares other remembrances from his career, like the 1945 Pool 4B explosion, wartime industry, and having to train elevator staff on car checking processes. He recounts major changes, like the rotation of CGC staff around the waterfront, the introduction of hopper cars, improvements to dust control, and improvements to health and safety. Other topics discussed include audits of grain elevators in the eastern division, the dangers of work in the busy railyards, Canada's reputation for high quality wheat stemming from government regulations and standards, and his remembrances of working outside in all kinds of weather.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain weighing; Grain transportation—rail; Railcar checking; Inward weighing; Outward weighing; Boxcars; Boxcar unloading; Hopper cars; Dust control; Grain dust; Health & safety; Grain elevator explosions; Pool 4B explosion; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Grain elevator audits; Wartime industry; WWII veterans; Canadian Pacific Railway; Canadian National Railway; Fort William Elevator F; Fort William Elevator E; Western Elevator; Paterson Elevator; Lakehead Elevator; Northwestern Elevator; SWP Pool 4A & B

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It's August 13, 2012, and I am at Carrie Street--.

WK: Heritage.

NP: Heritage, interviewing Mr. Kelso. I will ask him to introduce himself, perhaps when he was born, and then we'll get right into the questions. Over to you.

WK: My birthday is 1919.

NP: And just so that we have it on tape, what is your name?

WK: My name is William E. Kelso.

NP: What does the E stand for?

WK: Edward.

NP: Okay. Were you born in--?

WK: I was born in Fort William. Lived all my life here except for when I went away for different reasons in the military and so on.

NP: So, since you lived in Fort William right from your birth, what was your first experience with grain elevators? Do you recall? Even before working with them, did--?

WK: The experience I had with grain elevators was I noticed all these big cement things around the port in the '30s. Never went near one. So, consequently, when I did go into the grain business, it was not until the end of the war. The reason why I went into the Board of Grain was on account of during the war, I suffered the loss of my arm. So, at the end when I come back and I was finished with the hospital, then I was placed in different positions to find employment for me. It turned out that I was able to join the Board of Grain Commissioners [Canadian Grain Commission].

NP: Had you known anything about the Board of Grain Commissioners?

WK: I had no idea of anything to do with the grain business, only that it made bread and that's what we ate.

NP: And what did your father do?

WK: My father was a city fireman. And my grandfather was a butcher.

NP: Okay. He was a city fireman then. How old were you when you came back from the war then? You said--.

WK: When I came back from overseas, I was 24.

NP: And was your dad still working in the fire department at that time?

WK: No, he hadn't got back from being overseas. He'd joined the forestry core.

NP: So, when did he come back?

WK: He came back around the same time as me, but I come back to Canada, and then I went through the hospital system.

NP: Where was that?

WK: Christie Street, Toronto. And then after I was discharged from hospital, then I started to work for the Board of Grain. Now, at first when I went to work, I worked in the elevators on the river.

NP: Do you recall—I know it's going back quite a number of years—do you recall how you felt about going into the elevators? You said you saw them from a distance, but what did you think of them when you got closer?

WK: Well, it was a case of having to find something that I could do. I asked for a job that I would be inside and outside. I didn't want to get tied to an inside job, or an outside job for that one. So, I wanted something where I could be in and out. So, it happened that the supervisor that took me to the elevator and started me off, I stayed there for, oh, maybe three months.

Then they asked me if I would go over to the yard office—that's the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] yard office—and relieve a man who was the inspector for the grain cars, which I did. Then I went back to the elevator for another period of time. Then the supervisor asked me again if I would go to Neebing—the CNR [Canadian National Railway] yard Neebing—if I would do the same job there, which I did. I was relieving the people there who were working, so when the time was up, I come back to the elevator for

another period of time. I ended up in Paterson's Elevator. So, I wasn't there very long before the supervisor asked me if I would go to Neebing yards and take the job permanently. I thought it was just what I was looking for. It was an inside-outside job.

[0:05:31]

NP: When did that change take place? How long were you working in the elevator versus going permanently to the--?

WK: Well, I left the elevator setup in, oh, I would suppose, let's say May of 1945. Around the end of the war, actually, in Europe.

NP: And I can't recall whether you said what date you started with the Grain Commission?

WK: I started in November of '44. I don't know the exact date, but.

NP: Did you work at several elevators along the Kam, or always at Paterson's?

WK: No, I worked at Elevator E, and Elevator of Fort William, and the Western Elevator, and Paterson Elevator. That's the only ones that I'd come in contact at that time. Then I ended up in Neebing yards where I spent 17 years until they discontinued my position plus the inspection department too. All the Grain Commission employees were sent to finish their service in the elevator. So, now I go back to the elevator in 1962, and I finish my service that I did up until '72. But I retired on sick leave because of my eyesight.

NP: When was that?

WK: That was 1972. That would be February, something like that, of '72.

NP: Think back to your first days, then, working at the elevators. You mentioned Elevator D--.

WK: I went to Elevator E first. That was the first one.

NP: Is an elevator pretty much an elevator, or did those different elevators have personalities?

WK: Oh, well practically every elevator was different. There was very few elevators--. They all did the same thing, generally speaking. They unloaded the grain cars, and the grain was taken into the elevator, weighed, and put into storage. Then the elevator

system would handle it until such time as they were going to ship it by boat. The same time that I was working in the elevator on account of--. I should have mentioned that I worked for the weighing staff. But as I was supervising unloading in the elevator, the inspection staff, they were taking samples. They were samples that went to their office to be graded. So, there was the two processes in the elevator that we went through. We weighed the grain into the elevator, and the inspections, they graded the parcel that we had weighed. They graded it. So, you had a grade and a weight. That was the elevator system.

NP: Now, the elevators themselves, you said they all did the same thing, but they were different. Can you describe the elevators that you worked in and what you thought of them? Which ones you liked, didn't like, or--?

WK: Well, in the beginning, when I went to the elevator system, they shovelled grain into hoppers and then elevated it to the scale floors. That was done, but basically all the same way. Later on, not during my time in the beginning, they had dumpers. So, they had these things that would take a boxcar and shake it and dump the grain, instead of having to shovel it with manpower. The idea was that in the shovelling of the grain with the cables and everything else, it was a pretty risky business. And dirty. But practically every elevator was different in different ways, but they're all the same and doing the same thing, but the way they did it.

[0:10:34]

NP: What do you remember about Westland Elevator?

WK: Westland was an old elevator that was put together. There was two pieces to it. My job, when I was in the elevator system, I was responsible to see that all the grain from the boxcars went in the hopper, and the hoppers were clean after that parcel would be elevated up to the scale floor. Now, at the same time, I was responsible for making sure that there was no spillage of grain in the basement. The basements were pretty rough things to be in. In the early days, they were very dirty, but gradually, as time went on, in my second stage of working the elevator in the '60s, we cleaned the elevators up considerably in the part that we were responsible for.

Then, after the grain is processed in the elevators, now it's taken and a shipping order comes out, and they're going to put the stuff in the boats. Now it's got to go into shipping bins and so on. Well, I was utilized upstairs where the shipping bins were, where I had to sound the shipping bins to make sure the grain when it went in there, it come out of there, and so there was nothing left over. But I was utilized in different positions like that to ensure that what we were doing was done the way it should be done.

NP: So, you said Elevator D was in two pieces.

WK: No, no Elevator--. You said--.

NP: Westland, Westland.

WK: Paterson was one elevator. All the elevators were mostly considered one elevator, but this Elevator E, if I'm not mistaken, it was at the end of Ford Street. If I'm not mistaken, it was two pieces put together. You could look at the construction of it. Then Western was two pieces that was more or less put together to operate as one. But Fort William and Paterson, Elevator D and so on, Northwestern and whatever, they were all single built elevators.

NP: Now, the Electric Elevator and Northwestern, they were up in the turning basin.

WK: Yeah. Lakehead Elevator.

NP: Oh, Lakehead? Which was the Lakehead one?

WK: Lakehead was the one closest to the Great Lakes Paper.

NP: Okay. I've never heard it called the Lakehead, so that's good to know.

WK: That's what we called it.

NP: Was that right at the beginning in 1944 you called it Lakehead? Or did it get that name later?

WK: Well, no, that would be later in the'60s. But as far as I know, it was always called the Lakehead. Previously, they might have called it, like you said, Electric, but it was never Electric to my knowledge. Then there was the Northwestern. The Lakehead, it was a flimsy wood and tin. When the wind would blow the thing would shiver. It was small capacity. The Northwestern next door to it was a basic elevator with a shed for grain going in and shipping bins at the other end, used for boat loading, with the in between stuff being scale floors and bins for storage and so on.

NP: Who owned those elevators, do you know? I mean obviously Patersons owned Paterson, but do you know who owned any of those elevators?

WK: I don’t know who owned Lakehead, but the Northwest would be Federal Grain. Then you’d go around the harbour, we had 20 odd elevators. Out there at the Mission there was the Searle Elevator and the Grand Trunk.

[0:15:12]

NP: And you got to know those later on?

WK: Oh, yeah. I served at every elevator in the Lakehead here eventually. Things changed in the ‘60s from what it had been previous.

NP: In what way?

WK: Well, a lot of the workers—inspection or weighing—they stayed for long periods of time in a particular elevator and so on. But afterwards in the ‘60s, things started to change in that they took the men and rotated them from one end to the other. The Port Arthur people come to Fort William, and the Fort William people went to Port Arthur. So, it was all mixed up. Everybody was familiar with every elevator. But it wasn’t like that before my time. I was told that everybody, they almost grew up with each elevator where they were working. But that’s the way they did things then, but that’s not my knowledge.

NP: What do you think led to that change?

WK: Efficiency. For the good of everybody. Up to the time I went back into the elevators in ’62, the elevator system was kind of, as far as we were concerned—the government people, us—it was kind of a bit of a hit and miss at times.

NP: What do you mean by that?

WK: Well, they didn’t have full control all the time. But when the new supervisors come into our Grain Commission, and they started to enforce the rules the way they were supposed to be intended. One of the things was to move the people around, so they got to know what was happening in other places.

NP: Was there also some concern that you’d get too cozy with the elevator staff?

WK: Yeah, that could be part of it. That was part of it. That was the same as any job as far as that goes. But in the ‘60s when I was in the elevator system, I was responsible for a little bit of the action going on in the elevators in that I knew all about the dust

control in the elevators because my brothers in the '40s had been working for the Day Company putting in all this dust control systems. Over a period of time, the dust systems were never inspected. They were left to plug up, so they didn't do the work. But when I went into the elevator in '62, one of the first things they said to me was, "You know the score, Bill, so we'd like you to go and check out what would be necessary to bring the dust control that we are responsible for back into operation." Which I did.

NP: And what did that mean?

WK: It meant that all the basements, the part that we were responsible for, every day it was cleaned—no spilt grain or anything like that. The dust control system over the belts, they all worked. So, I was responsible to go around to not all the elevators, but quite a few of them, to make sure that the dust controls were working. Well, the elevator companies didn't like the idea, but after they got the system back to working, then they appreciated it, and they said so. Not to me as an individual, but I mean, to my supervising outfit.

NP: Speaking about your supervisors, who were some of the people that you worked with in those earlier days?

[0:19:52]

WK: Well, when I first joined up there was the Board of Grain was--. Gee, I can't think of his name now. We had a commissioner here in the weighing staff—I'm talking weighing staff now, nothing to do with the inspection—I can't think of the grain commissioner, but there was a fellow by the name of Dykes. He was the walking boss at the time. He was the one that put me in different places. Then after I left the elevator system and went into the yards, then the people were changing, and I didn't know some of the people. But when I went back into the thing in '62, then most of the supervisory staff, the ones in charge, I knew them because I'd grown up with them. Thibeault and Angie Bass, they were the head and the assistant for the weighing staff. Now, in the inspection staff, I knew them, but I can't remember their names.

NP: Where were the offices at that time when you joined up?

WK: They were in what we called the Grain Exchange which was at the Chapple's Building eventually. Then from there, they moved over to that new place on Archibald in the government offices that had the post office over there.

NP: You raise a lot of things that I wanted to ask you about. One was you said there were portions of the elevator that you as a government weigh person were responsible for. Which parts of the elevator were you responsible for and why? Why just certain parts?

WK: Well, we had no control over the elevator in the main part.

NP: The bins, for example?

WK: But when the cars come in, they've got to go into the shed, and the grain has to be put into the hoppers. The hoppers, which are above ground, but down below in the basement you have belts and so on in an area there where the grain is moved from the hoppers to the legs that are going to take it up to the scale floor. Well, I was responsible for the hoppers on the outside, for whatever was necessary—cleanliness, or to make sure that they're operating properly and whatnot—and then underneath I was responsible to make sure that the underneath was all clean and working properly. The idea being that if we had a spill of grain down below, it could be picked up with no problem, put it back on the belt, and weighed. Otherwise, if it was all full of garbage and everything else, it would get mixed, so there would be a loss of grain. Right?

Now, we've got the grain going up the leg to the scale. Now, from the scale, the grain then is put into a bin or whatever the company wants it to go. So, we lose control at that point. Now, the next thing we do is we are responsible for the shipping end then. So, in the shipping end, in some cases you've got scales, but otherwise you don't. You used the same scales as you had for taking the grain in, and then it's shipped by belt to the shipping bins. Well, we're responsible for the cleanliness and the working order of the shipping bins. So, you can see that we've got the inwards and we've got the outwards. But the biggest part of the building is governed by the company itself.

NP: Did you find that different companies paid more or less attention to cleanliness and how things worked?

WK: Yes, yes. There'd be a difference between one company and the other, but not a great difference. I would imagine people working for the companies would rather work for one company more so than the other one because of working conditions and so on.

[0:25:17]

NP: Did certain companies have good reputations as quality places to work?

WK: Well, in my knowledge, when I was there—when we started to make them clean things up—they were a little bit bothersome. But eventually they appreciated because we had everything under control, which they never had before. But no, generally speaking, I found nothing to worry me about working with the--.

NP: Who were the grain men, say, the company grain men, managers that you would have worked with at the time?

WK: Oh, I--.

NP: Was Mr. Irwin there then?

WK: No, I knew a lot of these people, but I don't remember their names. I don't remember their names. They knew what I had to do, so I went ahead and done it. I didn't bother them, and they didn't bother me. So, I was just doing my job.

NP: You talked about the basements, the tunnels. I have an interest, just a personal interest, in wildlife around the elevators. [Laughing] Can you add to that?

WK: Yes. At different times you'd find some wildlife in the basements because some of them were close to the surface. Others were down a little deeper and so on. But rats were a big problem whenever you went anywhere down in the basement. Most of the time that I was in the basements or in the foundations was during audits, when we were running audits. Then we went everywhere because we had to seal the whole elevator and had to run them and so on. So, the thing was that most of the time we weren't anywhere near any of the underground parts, but there was a few things that used to crawl around. Mostly in the rat business, but you would find maybe some other smaller animals. Down east is where you'd find more of them because most of the elevators there were built on the ground, so if they left a window open, foxes or whatever, skunks, and everything else could crawl in.

NP: When you talk about down east what are you talking about?

WK: We're talking about from Goderich all the way down the lakes right to Halifax.

NP: Were you responsible for those for audits?

WK: Oh, yes. I went down east for one audit in '64 I think it was. On account of some of the elevators, to go from the bottom to the top, it wasn't the best ways of getting up and down. So, I told them I wouldn't go up and down some of these things because I'm not talking about a regular elevator. A lot of them had elevators--. A lot of them had these here—I don't know what they call them—but--.

NP: Man lifts?

WK: Yeah, that's right. They were, as far as I was concerned, with only one arm, you had to hang on, but you had to control it too. And you're standing on a platform, right? So, I did use them, but not very often because they were a little bit worrisome for me.

So, I worked most of the bottoms of the elevators. I had to contend with water and ice because we went down there in the wintertime. I had to contend with quite a few animals. So, what we would do—not me personally, but the elevator—they would start the belts up for an instant and then shut them back off again so that all they did was just move. Anything that was laying on the belts, they were gone. But they had foxes and skunks, practically anything down there crawling around in their basements. Some of the places were close to being new, and they were nice and clean. Some of the others were a little older, but they come in different shapes and size.

[0:30:33]

NP: Now, you said you'd spent a few years at Paterson Elevator.

WK: Well, I went there for a winter, I think it was, in my early years. The winter of maybe '45. Yeah, it would be about the winter of '45, '46, and then I went to Neebing yards. So, I only spent a few months there.

NP: So, when you started then at the elevators, the wartime grain storage must have still been in place.

WK: Um, they had these big bins full of grain and so on, but I had never had anything to do with them. They existed when I first started, but I wasn't around the elevators when they were emptied.

NP: So, you don't know what happened? How they came down or when they came down?

WK: No, no. I have no--. All there is left is some big cement platforms. But I have nothing to do with any of these big storage bins.

NP: So, what was the--. Paterson's, did they have the annex building up then as well?

WK: Yeah, they had what they called the synagogue.

NP: Tell me about it.

WK: That was an annex that was different than anything else. It had very large bins—what did they call them?—like a silo. It had a fancy curved roof on it, and it was off to one side. I never did see it working or anything because it didn't have anything to do with me because I was never there when they audited Paterson's, so I had nothing to do with that. But I knew of it. They said it was kind of a difficult operation.

NP: I understand it had a spiral staircase inside.

WK: Oh, it could. I don't know. I've never been anywhere near it inside. I've been outside, but not inside. When I was there working at Paterson's one time, they were drilling holes in the floors—cement—and they were filling underneath the floors with compressed cement and trying to lift it up and level it off. So, what they'd do is put all the stuff underneath it and bring it up, see? So, that means that the annex was not being used for that period of time. But that's the only thing that I know about that.

NP: So, was it the annex they were lifting or the elevator itself?

WK: Yeah. Oh no, the annex. The synagogue. It was a separate place altogether, that one. Paterson's had a workhouse in the middle, what they called the workhouse. Then on each side of the workhouse was the storage annexes where the bins were. Being on the river, Paterson's, they went along the dock. All the others, they used to go from at the back of the track out to the dock, but Paterson's was built alongside the dock or the river.

NP: Did it make much difference which orientation they were?

WK: No. Not really.

NP: Just a longer trip from the back of the elevator to the shipping spouts?

WK: Well, yeah, the thing is it didn't concern us anyway. If, for instance, Elevator E or Fort William, they had their--. The trackage was close to the railroad itself, and the boxcars would be in the shed where they were going to empty them. When they processed them, then the storage was from there to the river. But in Paterson's, for an example, their storage was spread along the river, so that the place where the hoppers and that were, they were here, and they just emptied the car, went through the workhouse, and then it had to go alongside. Where the others went straight over towards the river, Paterson was like in the opposite direction, two of them. Practically every elevator was a little different in some forms. Some were all covered in topped bins, others were open, so they were dirty and everything, and dangerous, and you could fall in them.

[0:35:52]

NP: Did anybody ever have an accident in the elevators you worked in?

WK: Not to my knowledge, but I don't doubt that they did. Not to my knowledge. There was no accidents when I was working there, but I only worked--.

NP: Not that long before you moved to the railway.

WK: Well, I only worked maybe—oh dear—well, let's say I worked a year before I went to the yards permanently. Then when I come back, I worked for 10 years then, and that was it. In the 10 years I worked in the end, things were a lot better off than they were previously.

NP: Safety was more of a concern?

WK: Well, yes, but also conditions were better because they had new buildings that they'd put up and so on. Not elevator, but the other things that were put together. Like Pool 7 was a big guy. It had dumpers and shovels and everything. It was a big operation Pool 7.

NP: So, was your career, did it span the time when they brought in hopper cars? Or was that after you retired?

WK: Oh, they were there before I retired.

NP: So, hopper cars were quite an improvement?

WK: Oh, yeah. They were a big improvement. Big improvement. From the time they left the country elevators out in the Prairie until they got into the system here, they couldn't steal the grain very well.

NP: Who is the *they*?

WK: The people who lived alongside the railroad track in the different places. In the old days, when I was working the yard—Neebing yards—mostly boxcars, there was no hopper cars. Only in one year when we had a lot of trouble—I just forget the reason for it. They used a bunch of coal cars as hopper cars, and they made a wooden top for them—these were coal cars, coal hopper cars.

They were pretty rough and ready, but they used them for one season, I don't know when, on account of something to do with the weather, I guess. It could be we had a lot of frozen grain that had to be dried, or it was some purpose.

But when these other big tank cars come, the real hopper cars, they've got the bottom slides to open to let the grain out. Well, if you opened it up to steal any grain, it just kept running. So, there'd be an awful mess wouldn't there? Where with the boxcars, they used to drill holes in the bottom and run the grain out into what they're going to steal it with, then put a plug back in.

NP: So, was this in town or was this all the way along as it got delivered?

WK: That would be anywhere. To my knowledge, it was way out of town because when I'm checking at Neebing yards, these things are already happened. So, they could have happened anywhere that the train stopped for five minutes. But more than likely west, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, something like that.

NP: Well, let's move on from your time in the elevators then to when you moved to work in the yards. So, when you moved there permanently it was 1945 or so?

WK: Yeah.

NP: What was that job?

[0:39:54]

WK: Well, I would go there in the morning, 7:00, and I would immediately go to the office to start with. Then I'd go to the yard where the cars were, where the trains were. Out of Neebing, they had a dozen tracks, and each track would hold approximately 70 cars. So, my job on the outside was to go up and down these cars and check them for seals—either broken or together—or leaks anywhere around that car. It could be anyplace. Take down the particulars, and then after I was finished, then I'd go to the office and make out my report. In the meantime, another train would come in. So, in the early days of steam engines, it was nothing to have 20 or 30 trains coming in a day at the height of the season. So, I spent a lot of time outside in the yards.

NP: What was the height of the season? What months?

WK: Well, the height of the season would be--.

NP: September, October?

WK: Yeah, right in September approximately. When the harvest takes place. Then they'd be really coming in. Steam engines, they would only carry 70 or 80 cars. Then when they turned to diesels, then they were bringing in 120, 130 cars. So, they were a little harder to get along with because they'd fill the track and then they'd put a little piece on another track. The other guy would come down and he'd fill one track and put a little piece on maybe the same track, or whatever. So, you had to run all over the place. But during the season, I had quite a bit of work, and mileage. I covered an awful lot of mileage, but it was the best thing that ever happened, health wise, walking all day long. But then I'd make up my report, and it would go into the office along with the inspection staff.

The inspection staff made out tickets, grades, that they put on the boxcars so that when the boxcar went into the elevator, there was a ticket there for the inspection staff to take off. That gives them the information of what the car was when it come to the Lakehead. My thing, my report, was that the cars that I had noted that they had leakage to them. I reported them that they knew what to expect when they got to the elevator. That was the reason for us being there. We had prior knowledge, so we could tell our staffs in the elevator what to expect.

NP: What would happen to your reports? How did they work through the system?

WK: My report would go to the office, and it would be distributed, I imagine, to where it was necessary. For instance, I might have, say, 20 leaks. I would have had where the grain come from, and I would have had where it was supposed to go, whatever elevator. That would be leaks. But at the same time, I would report the cars that had broken seals on them. I'd find a car with a broken seal on the door, and I didn't know whether that broken seal meant that somebody had been in the car and stole grain, you see, or whether it was broken and that's it, because in the beginning when they loaded the car out west, they immediately sealed the car. It was then brought down here. Well, they had the estimate of grain that they put in that car at the source and the grade, but those were temporary.

So, when it come down here, and we emptied it in the elevator, and they weighed it, and graded it, those were final figures. So, the idea being that if there was nothing against the car as far as leaks or seals or anything detrimental, then the weight that come out of that car was the accepted weight. Now, when they went to the elevator, the car was immediately checked for seals by my staff at the elevator, and also one of the fellows would take a load line. He would take an estimate of the grain in the car. They could pretty well tell if it had been stolen or whatever, if things went along with it.

[0:45:47]

NP: So, was that when they sounded the cars? The term sounding the cars, like just knocking them to determine where the level of the grain was inside?

WK: Oh, no. That comes a little later. The idea is now the car had gone to the elevator, and let's assume the seals are intact, there's no leakage shown, so that car is in good shape. It goes to the elevator, and it's unloaded. Well, part of our job then, once they shovelled the car—or shook it, whatever process they used—they put it in the hopper, and it was taken away. Now, that car then had to be examined by me or the person that's doing it. But it would have to be examined, so I would check the walls of the cars by tapping them. You could tell if there was grain behind the walls that hadn't been taken out. So, you'd have to report the boxcar as "Grain in the walls" and things like that.

NP: So, when you say *grain in the walls*, is it like a house then, where you would have a stud space and grain would accidentally get in there?
****
WK: It all depended on the boxcar. In my time, I started out and I would suppose that most of the cars were wooden boxes. So, they only had the one layer of wood all the way around, okay? But later on, they—at the same time, but later on—they got steel cars, and lots of them, and they had liners in them. They had the steel outside and then they put a wooden thing on the inside just like in a house. So, you've got space in between, right? Well, when they were shovelling grain, these things were always open at the top. When they were throwing the grain into it, it would go in behind there and pack that space. Well now that space could be packed of course in 1962. But that same grain could be in it 1965, unless they took it out in the first place.

So, eventually they asked me what would I do to stop that bother? I said, "Well, you people," I says, "you put the inside boards inside the steel cars." In the beginning these boxcars were not only used for grain. They were used for other things. The wood inside was so they could attach holding devices to them, or furniture—whatever they were putting in there, see? Well, eventually they become only in the grain trade, but still. And I advised them to take all that wood out, so they'd have a naked wall and that way there'd be nothing to hold grain. Well, some did, and some didn't—I mean the railroads. But a lot of these cars still had their liners, so if we found out that there was grain in the liner, we'd have to report it.

Well, I thought, "This makes an awful lot of bother, and you don't know who's going to win." So, the idea was let's pull the bottom board off and the grain would come out. Well, some of these elevator workers would do that and they'd take all the grain out. Everything's fine! The railroad would get it and put boards back in place again. So, it was just around, around, around.

Consequently, the best thing that happened then was when they put the tank cars into service more and more and more. But there was an awful lot of grain left in the liners that would eventually ended up in chicken coops and stuff. You'd be surprised at the grain trade at nighttime.

[0:50:16]

NP: Did you get to see that?

WK: No, I knew of it, but I never seen it. But the car would go into the elevator—not so much here at the river, but over at Intercity—the car would go into the elevator and be unloaded, and grain in the liner reported. Then the car would be taken up and pushed to one side, waiting for the trains to haul them away. In the meantime, the night operators are working. Soon as they find out there's grain in the liner, they were into these boxcars, and they took the bottom board out, and they took all the grain with it, and away they went with truckloads.

I've heard them talking, different ones, about how they got away with all this grain. Well, the farmer had grown it. The elevator had accepted it. The railroad had hauled it, and here it was. There was a given amount of grain, right? So, when we weighed it, it might have been, say, oh, 500 pounds short. But where was it? It was gone! So, consequently, you had the farmer and the elevator people and the night operators all sharing the same grain. Well, when the tank cars came in, they put a stop to all of that. But that's the way the business was operating.
****
NP: Yeah. If they were sounding a car and they found that there was some grain left in the car, did they ever put it back on the track and back in? Or it was--?

WK: No. I don't know what happened to the grain eventually, I mean, assuming it was still there when the car was taken back. In the case of, we'll say, there's a car unloaded, and it's put on the track, it's hauled back to Neebing yards, and it's sent west. It could be loaded with grain in the liners. It never did get taken out until maybe one of these times when it was coming back. So, it was kind of a hit and miss deal. But the best thing was that when they took all the liners out there was no more of that to happen. Then at the same time as when the tanks come in, they put a stop to it.

But you see the thing was, what we were there for, our main function actually, was to guarantee that the farmer who grew the grain and the railroad who hauled it to the elevators who worked it, they all got a fair shake. But if in the meantime there was somebody taking out parcels of the grain that they weren't entitled to, then somebody was going to lose out, weren't they? The railroad wouldn't get paid for that amount that they hauled, the farmer wouldn't get paid for that amount he had deposited in the elevator.

Now, of course, there's a whole new system. The farmer grows it, whether he might sell it outright to the country elevator or the company, and then he doesn't get anything. But a lot of these farmers working with the—what they call it?

NP: The Wheat Board?

WK: The Wheat Board. They would deposit it into the Wheat Board. They'd get a certificate telling you this is it, and then it would go by the railroad. The railroad would get paid according to the parcel that it hauled. Then when it went into the elevator it was weighed in there, they got another certificate. Then it was graded with another certificate. So, all along the people were getting a fair shake, the way it should be. Of course, now we're only talking about wheat and barley. The other grains were hauled and distributed and so on and so forth and handled. I don't know what would happen to them like the wheat and the barley guaranteed by the Wheat Board thing. They would have to have some guarantee, but they would sell their grain and take chances.

[0:55:29]

NP: So, when you think back to your time at the Neebing yards, any stories that come to mind other than the sort of day-to-day routine of inspection?

WK: Not really. Only that in the steam engine time it was really go, go, go. Where when we got to the diesels there wasn't so many trains. There was as many boxcars or whatever, but there wasn't as many trains because they could haul almost twice as much. So, outside of that, there was no real anything to do with us.

NP: I'm going to just throw this in now because I don't want to forget about it. But you mentioned that your dad was a fireman, and he--.

WK: City fireman.

NP: City fireman. And he came back after you did, after the Second World War. Now, there were two major explosions in the elevators, one in 1945 and one in '52.

WK: We seen the one in '45 from the yard office in Neebing.

NP: You could see it from Neebing?

WK: We could see over there and see the dust and everything. We didn't know what had happened, but we soon found out.

NP: Can you tell me anything more about that incident?

WK: Well, the reason for those things happening, conditions had to be perfect. You've got to have the dust, you've got to have the moisture, you've got to have the heat, and so on, and something to set it off. Now, if the dust control would have been working like it should be, these wouldn't happen, but they didn't have dust control in '45. All the elevators, they started putting dust control in in the late '40s, after the war. But if they had put those things in and worked them like they should have worked, they wouldn't have had to worry about anymore dust explosions. But, that ain't the way things work out.

NP: So, was your dad with the fire department then or he was not back yet? Because they would have been part of the emergency crews, right?

WK: Oh, he wasn't there for the '45. He wasn't there for the '45. You said '52?

NP: There was one in '52. Same place. Fewer people killed.

WK: Well, I kind of don't remember that one. But no, he wouldn't have had anything to do with them at all because he was a Fort William fireman, and they had the Port Arthur gang. They'd be called over if necessary, but I imagine if he'd been here for the '45 he would have been called over. But I don't know for sure. He come back, I think, before I come to town. I was back in Canada, but I think he come here in the fall of '44, come back from overseas.

The war was winding down in a lot of ways in November, Christmas of '44. The invasion had taken place, and we were winning you might say, so a lot of the things weren't going on. They weren't recruiting, didn't need to recruit for manpower anymore. A lot of the war work was starting to disappear, so things--. Of course, you weren't alive, but this country was one great big armament factory. Everybody in the country and every place in the country was hooked up someway with the war.

[1:00:04]

In 1939, when the war started, I was working in the Canada Car. We were building Hurricanes, which were going to be the fighters for the Battle of Britain, you know. But at that particular time, there was very few people in war work in Canada Car. You had to know somebody or be very lucky to get into the place to work. But after the war started, then things started to change.

Like in politics, in 1939, the CCF—the NDP of the day—they asked the governing body they need $50,000 to help out with the relief, feeding the poor and that. The guys riding the rods and everything, they didn't have any money. When the war started, they found billions of dollars. Where did it come from? Well, it's the same with the grain. They were using everything to haul grain in those days. But when you started getting down to the end of the war, things are vastly different. People started to be laid off and so on and so forth. But the elevators, they were going full blast, but previous to that they weren't. But they were going full blast, and they had a lot of people come from the west to work the elevators and everything else.

NP: During the war or after?

WK: During the war. And they stayed a lot of them. But prior to that in 1939, say July of '39, you couldn't find a paying job around here at all. But a year from then, July of '40, there'd be lots of work. You might have to go someplace for it. Then when you keep on going down the road, this place--. If you're flying an airplane across Canada in those years—'42, '43—you could close your eyes and land and you'd be landing on an airfield. Yet in 1939, you couldn't find an airfield because there wasn't any. We didn't have any, for instance, in Thunder Bay. So, everything was geared--. The war made all the difference in the world.

NP: In many ways.

WK: Oh, yes.

NP: So, with your time with the railway then, is there anything else about your job that you'd like to add?

WK: Not really. There were dangers to the business.

NP: What were those?

WK: Well, you had to be very careful when you're moving amongst boxcars. You didn't know when they were going to move. So, you had to be very careful. Most of my time was spent in what they call the inward yard. But then when the boxcars went over the hump—the hump is a thing what it says, a bump. They pushed the cars over it, and then they'd run down the other side, and the other yard over there would be a clash yard where all these cars--.

When they come in, they're just strings of cars, right? Then they get allotted to go to different elevators, plus whatever else there is. In the clash yard, the tracks there are numbered—Paterson's, Northwestern, Pool 7, whatever. So, when they come over the hump, and they have riders, all these cars go down into these different tracks where they're allotted. Well, down there in that clash yard

you had to be damn fast on your feet because there's cars coming down there all the time, banging and moving the ones that are already there. So, you've got to be very careful.

Now, there was only one of me, and there would only be one of the inspection staff, so we were doing all right. But there was a lot of other workers—car checkers and hump riders and so on—and cars are moving all the time. So, there used to be an awful lot of people getting injured and killed in the train business. Oh, yeah. And the biggest part of our train business was grain. That's what made the place. So, you had to watch yourself.

[1:05:27]

NP: You said that your time at the yard came to an end, what brought about that change?

WK: Well, in 1962 they decided that it wasn't necessary for me to do what I'm doing, or it wasn't necessary for the inspection staff to do what they were doing because things had changed. An awful lot of things in the working world had changed—different set of different systems and so on in my case, for instance. So, you're going to check these 100 cars, and you're going to see if there's anything wrong with them. If there is or if there isn't makes no difference. So, the cars go into the elevator, but we've got staff there that, if they knew what to do, they could check them, so there'd be no need for me. But in the beginning, they had me doing this, so they'd have a prior knowledge of what to expect when they got to the elevators.

But by the time the middle '60s had come, they decided we didn't need that because now--. One of the first things they did with me—I told you about dust control—one of the very first things they did with me when I left the railroad and went to the elevator, as it turned out I went to Paterson's. One of the walking bosses, his office was there. So, when I walked into there, they got a hold of me and they said, "Bill, we'd like to use your knowledge." And I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, you spent all that time at the yards," he says, "You know what every leak is possible," and so on and so forth. "So, we want you to put together a program, and then we want you to go to every elevator here at the Lakehead and teach the fellows there what you already know. So, when this car comes to the elevator, they can do the same thing as you've been doing."

So, what I was going to do is work myself out of the job. Well, which I did. Of course, right off the bat, all the guys working in the elevator, they resented me going there. When my supervisors who used to go there with me, when they would leave and I'd be standing around waiting for the time to go home, they'd be using snide remarks and everything. "What the hell do you know more than we do?" and all this sort of stuff. But they had to change all their tactics, and they had to make up reports, which they didn't want to do. That meant they had to push the pencil a little bit farther. As it turned out, everybody was made knowledgeable for what they were looking for, and then afterwards everything went along smooth.

Then the second thing they went, they sent me to the Northwestern and told me to check the dust system, which I did. Then they utilized that. But as it turned out, they told me that, "Whatever you're doing here, and if we accept it, it's also going to be used in Vancouver," because they were a shipping port too, see? They did the same thing as we did. The boxcars went in there, and they went through the elevator, and then the grain was shipped out to wherever. In the beginning it wasn't a big deal, but it is now.

NP: So, did you get sent out west to do some training there? Or down east?

WK: No, no. Down east didn't count because all the grain down east had been processed here. It's all clean, it's all graded. So, there's no need to go down there to tell them anything. The grain goes down there by boat. It's put into an elevator. The elevators down east, all they are is transfer houses. They take the grain in and then they put it out into the boats going overseas or wherever they're going.

Here we processed all the grain by cleaning it. As I understand it, a parcel of grain would come from the farmer, the railroad, to the elevator. The elevator would take that parcel of grain and they'd process it. In other words, they'd clean it, take all the nails and wood and bugs and everything out of it, and then they could make that maybe a higher grade. So, they'd get paid for a higher grade, the elevator, because they processed the grain, see? But when the grain went in, it went in what the shape it was, but when it went out, it was in perfect shape. That was because it was going to be shipped down east and then to a customer, right?

[1:11:18]

Now, over the whole picture is that all the grain-growing and shipping countries of the world used our grain as what you had to go by. All our grains in most cases were the--. They've got fancy words for it now.

NP: Sort of like the golden rule of--?

WK: Yeah. If you're going to ship wheat, if you want it to be so and so, it's got to meet our standard, because we had the best of all these things. One reason why we had the best grain, we had people who were developing the grain and everything all the time, R&D and that. But we also--. It was controlled by the government. It wasn't a company, a private company. It was controlled by the government.

NP: Now, some people would say that, not happily, but--.

WK: I know! Because they can't make any profit out of it! Like the Yanks now, everything is owned by the company or the bank or whatever. Being capitalistic, the more you can steal—well I shouldn't use that word—but the more profit they can make, the easier they can make it and pile it up, is legal. Legal theft, as I figure. [Laughing] But over here, we've got the government control. They don't like us, our system, because they call a lot of ours—the health system—socialism. We call it sharing whatever there is. But they don't like that because they can't make a profit on it, see? Everything's got to be profit over there! It's built on capitalism. That's why they control the world, or they did, because they're also responsible for a lot of the mess the world's in. For the almighty dollar. Don't get me started on that. [Laughing]

NP: I better ask you this now just in case I forget to ask it at the end. I don't want to not ask it. I just want you to verify that I read you the letter at the beginning of the interview.

WK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

NP: And that actually there was an Oral History Recording Agreement that, also, because of your eyesight, I'll just read it quickly recognizing here that this is sort of the cart before the horse.

The oral history recording agreement says: "I've read and understand the letter about Voices of the Grain Trade project. I'm happy to participate by being interviewed regarding my connection with the grain trade. I understand the potential benefits of this project to the community and to researchers. I do not see any risks to myself in participating. I understand that I'm free to withdraw from the interview at any time, or not respond to certain questions. I agree that my recorded interview and accompanying material will be held by the institute in perpetuity and may be made available for research at Lakehead University archives and in the archives of Thunder Bay Historical Museum, subject to any restrictions. I agree that my interview and accompanying material may be quoted or shown in full or in part in the form of a transcript or a digital form on the Friends of Grain Elevators website or in its publications, subject to any restrictions I may request." So, if I can just have you say that you would agree to this.

WK: I agree to everything that the interviewer has read to me.

NP: Great.

WK: They can say anything they want about what I've said. [Laughing] because I'm not afraid of anybody.

[1:15:23]

NP: Okay, that's good. Now, that's interrupting things here. I have a couple of standard questions that we ask. You were answering a lot of them as we went along, so they may sound a little repetitious, but you can just say, "No, I have nothing to add." What would you like people to know most about the work that you did and the places you worked? So, if you had to answer that question in a couple of sentences or so?

WK: In my own personal case, I thought that I give them full effort for their money that they paid me. I believed in the system, so that I was trying to give everybody a fair shake. I didn't favour anybody. Like I said before, from the farmer to the railroad to the terminal elevators that worked it to the person that buys the grain, and it's gone wherever it's going, I wanted everybody to have a fair shake at it. I didn't want any of them to make a big fat profit or anything. They got their fair share.

NP: I think you've sort of answered this question too, but what might interest people or surprise people most about the work you did?

WK: Well, they might be surprised to know that the Grain Commission, the part of the government that is the Grain Commission, was one of the few things that paid off, that didn't cost the taxpayer any money. We paid our way for the services that we rendered.

NP: What are you most proud of when you look back on your career?

WK: Well, I spent almost four years working in the military and here I put another 27 years still working for the government. So, I figure I've given the country a fair shake.

NP: I like that answer. I think you've answered this, but not directly. I'm going to just make a comment from what I've learned about the grain trade since this project. To me, it's quite remarkable that a country as big as ours, geographically, but with such a small population and a pretty—what's the word I'm looking for?—rugged climate has managed to become one of the world's largest grain traders. When you think about the work that you did, do you think that it contributed to Canada's success as a grain trader in any way?

WK: Well, certainly. It's made the grain business. If you take our standards that we've given the world, nobody can dispute the results that we put out. That's why we're successful here, our form of life, government, and so on. Mainly, we do our job plus. We have no way to have to worry about anybody else in the world say they did more than we did, or we will be doing more.

NP: The changes that occurred or are occurring in the grain trade. You had mentioned before we started the interview that you had noticed, even though you're now almost 93 I understand and retired 50 years ago now, would it be? '72, yeah about 50 years ago you retired.

[1:20:02]

WK: Oh, yeah. I've cost the company money. [Laughing]

NP: The changes that have come about, the example that you gave was the Wheat Board. So, obviously you've been following the industry a little bit. What are your thoughts about the changes that are occurring?

WK: Well, of course, the changes to the grain trade especially here, we had no control over because it's a worldly thing. Now, the railroads have gone right down to hardly noticeable. The CNR here is practically dead, because of the grain trade and other things too. But the way things have gone haven't been for the best. But you must remember that too much of our country is owned by somebody else, all because our own people, they like to have a few more dollars than the other guy. Everything is sold for what they can get for it. Offer them enough, and they'll sell it to you.

NP: In your job did you have any connection with the Wheat Board at all? Or that was always done through--?

WK: Well, that was part of the program we worked under. The Wheat Board being, like I said, they guaranteed a minimum profit, price, to the farmer for wheat and barley. And also, as I understood it, they give the farmer a better price when the world prices were higher. So, they kept the farmer in between not disappearing all together in the low side, but they weren't selling everything for the most dollars they could get.

NP: I think they were selling for the most dollars they could get, but the profits were--.

WK: When I'm talking about for the most dollars at enormous prices. Now, the system that we work under I don't like. For instance, if we got a surplus of whatever, then they charge so much—usually a reduced price to get rid of it. Then when we're going along, and we've got a regular amount of goods for whatever it is, we sell it at that price. Now, suddenly we've got a shortage, and what happens to the price? They double it or triple it! Why should people, especially people who depend on food, have to pay two or three times for food, just because it's short in supply? As far as I'm concerned, it should be the same price as it was when we had plenty, and no higher.

Everything is done the same way in the system. As soon as you get a scarcity, charge more. If you're guaranteed a decent price when you've got enough, then why turn around and double it up or triple it up when there's a scarcity? I figure the scarcity should be shared by everybody. Now, right at the present time, they're blaming the Yanks for the corn and so on. You know, the low water.

NP: The drought.

WK: But here in Canada, our farmers are really giggling out west because they're not getting $5 a bushel now, they're going to get $8 a bushel. Isn't that nice? But the cost of bread is going to go up. You see what I mean by when it's scarce and so on? You don't play the game; you just get all the money you can get. Now, I understand when the farmer's selling, when there's hardly anything, he needs to recover. When he's got the grain he charges more, but if you get the standard price all the way through, then he wouldn't have to worry about that would he? He wouldn't have to go by a minimum and a maximum, he'd have a regular price if it go right from the low to the high to the shortage.

[1:25:15]

That's the way I look at it anyway. I don't believe in profit, excess profit. You know how to cure a lot of the ills of this world? We did it during our war. They charged excess profit on everything. And where did the excess profit go? Into the government's pocket. So, the rich people didn't get richer. The profit helped to pay the shot. That's why at the end of the war we didn't owe anybody but ourselves. So, profit is not--. They call it a dirty word.

NP: Well, as you say, excess profit.

WK: Yeah, excess. How much do you need?!

NP: Well, as you get older, the answer to that question changes, doesn't it?

WK: Well, why should it? I mean, if you had a guaranteed income with necessary adjustments for whatever.

NP: Have you had the chance to answer this question as fully as you'd like to? What were the most important events that happened in your workplace during your career?

WK: Well, our money wasn't the biggest amount of income in the system. The one thing we had going for us was a decent pension. Superannuation. Now, a lot of people had the opportunity to get into that, but they turned it down. We went with it. Now, unfortunately, it should have been something that should have been universal. Everybody would have been well off with a half-decent pension according to whatever they're working at. But now what do we got? We've got an awful lot of people their pensions are gone. The people they worked for, the company, they used the money for other purposes. Now they say, "We haven't got it." So, what do you do? You do without. Where I've been doing it for how many years?

NP: Well, '72 to 2012.

WK: I'm getting what I was entitled to. I'm still getting it. But I know other people working in other places, they're not getting their entitlement in their pension business, because the companies have used the money.

NP: Or disappeared.

WK: Oh, yes.

NP: Do you feel it's important to preserve and share Thunder Bay's grain trade history? And what aspects of that history do you feel we should concentrate on preserving? Our goal as a group, the Friends of Grain Elevators, we would hope to have at some point a National Historic Site. So, is that something that you would think--?

WK: Well, the thing is in that, I don't think you'd pick on an individual, only in that they'd be part of a cog in the wheel. So, what you would do in that business, you should go to the very beginning—which isn't that far back in this country—the early 1900s, I guess, around that time, turn of the century, 100 and so many years, which isn't long in things. But you start there, and you put down just what it's supposed to be—whether it ends up that way is besides the point. But what it's supposed to be and what it's supposed to do. And then as you go along, you don't need all the elevators listed, you only need one as an example of what you're doing. You've got a railroad and you've got a country elevator and you've got a farmer that produces the grain, it comes here, and we process it. Just the one elevator as an example, and what happens to the grain coming in and going out and so on.

[1:30:12]

Like I just heard the other day, what this older person was missing. Boat whistles. You don't hear a boat blowing anymore. They have no boat traffic to speak of. Well, there's a little bit. It's just a matter of setting it up, and you come down through time. If there's any changes, decent changes made, you put them into the system so a person can read right from the beginning right down

to the present day what was supposed to have been happening. As a sideline then, you can put down what did actually happen. The advent of dumpers, and then—it wasn't in my time—but they have these automatic scales now. Things like that that happened to the system. But it's just like cars, you know? You start out with a Model T, and you end up with a Cadillac as time goes on. But you can get caught up in too much detail. You can add the odd personal part to it.

NP: Which is what we hope these interviews will do. Add a personal touch.

WK: Yeah. You're going to take this here thing and you're going to—what do they call it?—edit it.

NP: Yes.

WK: You're going to throw away the garbage.

NP: Oh, no, we keep it all, but we'll use pieces.

WK: Yeah, you'll use pieces and parts of it. In my case, you're going to use basically my time in the yards and that back and forth.

NP: Do you have any pictures of your time as you worked? Was there any memorabilia, we call it, officially?

WK: Not really. I did have some, but it's all long gone.

NP: What did you do with it?

WK: Well, I have no idea.

NP: Pass it on to one of your children? Or just throw it in the--?

WK: Not really, no. When I was in the elevator, I didn't have anything. All we had in the elevator was forms and pencils, you know. I had a flashlight and my overalls or whatever, but very little actually. When I went out to the yards, then I still had the same pencil and the same forms to fill out, but outside that, nothing. So, I didn't have anything to accumulate. I don't remember taking any pictures.

NP: Is the hump still there?

WK: No, no, it's gone. And Neebing, I don't know about the CPR, but I think it's gone too. But they don't do those things anymore. Because they wouldn't want to take these tank cars, for instance, and run them down the hump, and they start smacking each other. The first thing you know they'd have grain in all directions, and pieces of tanks. [Laughing] The tank cars, they can carry almost two boxcars.

NP: The work that you did seemed to be very routine. Important, but routine. You did the yard work for 10 years, or 12 years, 15?

WK: 17.

NP: 17 years. Some would say that doing that day in and day out, it would be hard to maintain your enthusiasm for your work. What--?

WK: Not for me. I always turned in--. Like they say and whatever, "I give 110 percent." How in the hell can you give a full amount more, eh?

NP: So, how did you keep your enthusiasm up for a job that involved a fair bit of routine?

WK: Especially out there in the yards, there were a lot different things happening that—nothing to do with my job—but that was happening around me. You know, talking to the different fellows, and noticing where the steam engines were and when the diesels come in, and the ore trains, and the hump, and the different fellows—some I knew, some I didn't know. There was always bits and pieces all over the place. I always had a good time sticking my nose into things.

[1:35:12]

NP: Must have been a hard job to do in the wintertime.

WK: It was rough, I'll tell you, but I did it everyday. That it was necessary. There was some days that we had nothing to do whatsoever, because there was no action. But winters aren't what they used to be. If our winters now was there when I was working there, say, in the '50s, things would have been different.

NP: In what way?

WK: Well, it was a lot colder in the '50s than it was today.

NP: A lot more snow?

WK: Oh, yes.

NP: And I don't imagine they shovelled a pathway for you, or did they?

WK: No. They did do some plowing, but not all the time. They cleaned the--. When they got down low to the inbound, they would take everything out of there and then they'd get the spreader, which was a thing that pushed snow away. They'd do it once, maybe twice at the most, a winter if necessary. But we used to have to walk on top of snowdrifts and everything all the time. But in the wintertime, generally, we didn't have nowhere near the work we had in the summertime. But it was give and take.

NP: Balanced out.

WK: But you had to dress accordingly. My job today—I don't mean today, but I mean this time of the century—with the weather as it is, we would have seen guys out there, the car knockers—that's the guys inspecting the cars when they come in—the car knockers and so on, they would have been out there in their short sleeves or something. Or shorts! They wouldn't wear the proper clothing. But in my day, they wore the proper clothing because it was cold at times.

The coldest time on record in Fort William was a Saturday night. I don't think George was there. We had a poker session. George, your father. Where was it? At the end of Franklin Street, Burt Ross lived there, and he worked for the inspection staff. Jack Moore, you ever heard that name before?

NP: No, I don't think so.

WK: He was in charge of the inspection staff. Jack Moore, two other guys, and myself, we went to his house to play poker. Just for something to do. Penny-ante stuff. So, as the time went on, it got colder, and it got colder, and it got colder. This is Saturday night. So, when we went home, of course, from the end of Franklin Street at Empire, I was only around the corner from where I lived. Well, most of them lived in that area. One guy had a car. So, when he left, he had square wheels. Brand new car he had, too—1948 Dodge or something. So, it was the end of the '40s. He had square wheels! You know what that means?

NP: Everything was frozen stiff?

WK: Well, it was so bloody cold that the tires had collapsed like, see, and went flat on the bottom. Sometimes if you moved them, the tires come off the rims. But in those days, I think they still had tubes in them. So, anyway, away he went. When I got home--. Well, one of the other fellows, his wife was staying with my wife at the time. So, when we got back home, and then they took off—in those days we didn't have cars, most of us—so, I think they got the--. Maybe they lived somewhere around, I forget. But anyway, the radio—no TV at that time—the radio said it was 40 degrees below zero. I thought, "It sure felt cold, but not that cold." But there was no wind or anything, you see. We went to work the next morning, Sunday morning, and we were using a streetcar or a bus—I think we still had the streetcar—so we went to work. When we got to work, unfortunately there wasn't very much to do, but we went to work, and it was 42 below zero. The coldest ever recorded around here. That's Fahrenheit. And that's cold. And yet we walked around—we had parkas and that—we walked around. It didn't feel that cold. No way! You had to see the thermometer to tell how cold that was.

[1:40:23]

NP: I was interviewing a fellow who lived in the Westfort area, and he was a paperboy when he was a young guy.

WK: When he was young, okay.

NP: And it was interesting to me that he said, "You know, I just thought the other day about my paper route and how many people on my paper route were elevator workers."

WK: Oh, he wasn't an elevator man himself?

NP: Eventually he was, but he's my age so.

WK: Not a government man?

NP: No, he worked for Lake Shippers. But there were a lot of people in your neighbourhood who--.

WK: Oh, yes. Right! All around Westfort because they were the guys that worked on the river elevators.

NP: Because a lot would be working or taking bicycles or streetcars?

WK: They were within walking distance, a lot of them, from the elevators. Of course, the cold days, I don't know how the hell they got to work. But in the wintertime, the elevators didn't do that much work in the wintertime when the rivers froze and hardly any grain moving.

NP: So, many of them would be laid off in the winter?

WK: Oh, yeah. That was the big trouble. [Coughs] Pardon me. With the elevators. Seasonal. Railroad was the same thing, seasonal.

NP: Well, our time has come to an end. If you can believe it, we probably have just short of two hours of a great interview. Thank you so much. And just before I shut off the machine here, because we did a little bit more of an interview after I put the recording agreement in, just a final agreement then that you had the Oral History Recording Agreement form read to you?

WK: Yep!

NP: And you agreed with it?

WK: Yep!

NP: And you have no restrictions on your interview?

WK: Yep!

NP: Perfect. Thank you very much.

WK: Now that--.

End of interview.